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ABSTRACT

The landscape of higher education is being changed by increasing numbers of adult students, most of whom are part time. By 1992, it is predicted that 48 percent of all higher education enrollments would be part time and half of all college students would be over the age of 25. Causes of the trend include shrinking numbers of traditional-age students, greater emphasis on mandatory continuing education, and more jobs affected by technological change. Although adults may be motivated by job/career change, career enhancement, or personal enrichment, education is only one of many competing priorities. Part-time study may be an adult's only option. Barriers to part-time study for adults include the following: inability to resolve home/work/study conflicts or to organize study time; embarrassment, anxiety, and ambivalence about returning to school; inconvenient scheduling and access to campus services; lack of financial aid; time limits for completing course requirements; and campus rules and regulations designed for traditional-age students. These trends and barriers bring out four areas needing attention: academic assistance and personal advising, financial assistance, access to services, and flexibility. (An annotated bibliography cites 17 print resources. Four resource organizations are listed.) (YLB)

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ERIC *Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education*

TRENDS AND ISSUES

ALERTS

PART-TIME STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The landscape of higher education is being changed by increasing numbers of adult students, most of whom are part time. Between 1970 and 1989, part-time enrollment increased 109 percent, compared to 32 percent for full-time enrollment (Brown 1990); 55 percent of the part timers are in 2-year public colleges. Some have predicted that, by 1992, 48 percent of all higher education enrollments would be part time, and half of all college students would be over the age of 25 (Hartman et al. 1986; Rose 1988; Rountree-Wyly and Lambert 1988). Brown (1990) cites the following as some of the causes of this trend:

- Shrinking numbers of traditional-age students
- An increase in single-parent families
- Greater emphasis on mandatory continuing education
- More jobs affected by technological change
- More immigrants with professional skills
- Increasing access to information technology in households

Adults in higher education are often motivated by job/career change, career enhancement, or personal enrichment (Hawk 1988; Rogers et al. 1987). However, because education is only one of many competing priorities, part-time study may be an adult's only option. As many as 30 percent stop out (temporarily withdraw) at least once (Rountree-Wyly and Lambert 1988). Brown (1990) identifies the three top factors for part-time students' choice of a college: location (53%), curriculum (40%), and cost (30%). Hawk (1988) finds that economic returns are an important motivation for part-time students, but the least educated, lowest skilled, and lowest income groups are least likely to participate and their educational opportunities cost more (e.g., their employers are less likely to subsidize their study).

Hindrances to part-time study for adults include the following: inability to resolve home/work/study conflicts or to organize study time (Parkinson et al. 1987); embarrassment, anxiety, and ambivalence about returning to school (Carbone 1988); inconvenient scheduling and access to campus services; lack of financial aid; time limits for completing course requirements (Schlossberg et al. 1990); and campus rules and regulations designed for traditional-age students (ibid.).

The trends and barriers cited here make innovation the watchword for the future of higher education. The following areas need particular attention:

- **Academic assistance and personal advising**--help with reentry problems, remedial needs, self-confidence, and coping with conflicting responsibilities. Faculty and counselors should be trained to work with adults.
- **Financial assistance**--only 35 percent of part-time students receive federal aid, and only 29 percent receive state aid (Brown 1990).
- **Access to services**--convenient locations and times for advising, scheduling, bookstores, libraries; child care and transportation; enrollment innovations such as computers, telephones, one-form application/enrollment/receipt; satellite centers (Morris 1988; Rose 1988); nontraditional student handbook, association, newsletter (Porter 1989).
- **Flexibility**--in admission standards, transfer policy, credit for prior learning; course times and locations; acceptance of late assignments; computer conferencing and other distance education formats; allowance for stop out.

The following resources may be consulted for further information.

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Print Resources

Brown, J. N. *Lifelong Learning Trends. A Profile of Continuing Higher Education*. Washington, DC: National University Continuing Education Association, 1990. (ED 319 961)

National data on trends and participation in continuing higher education (CHE) are presented in five sections: factors leading to growth in CHE, student characteristics, financing, developing human resources, and personal fulfillment.

Carbone, J. M. *Going Back: Adults Talk about What They're Doing in College and How They Feel about Returning to School*. Cleveland, OH: Cuyahoga Community College, 1988. (ED 309 803)

Interviews with 19 college students aged 25-65 yield generalizations about adult students' motivations for returning to college.

Hartmann, J.; Wischropp, T. W.; Morgan, J.; and Radohl, D. "Dawn of a New Day." Conference paper, 1986.

Four presentations by teachers or administrators of college programs discuss (1) changing demographics of the college student body; (2) characteristics and special needs of part-time students; and (3) community college efforts to meet needs, including off-campus outreach and programs for refugees.

Hawk, T. "Determinants of Part-time Adult Student Participation in Education." Conference paper, 1988. (ED 292 594)

Recommends a pluralistic approach to higher education's subpopulations: those pursing career-related education or personal enrichment; the less educated; those with different learning styles and attitudes toward education. Consistency with business/industry needs is suggested.

Improving University Teaching. Proceedings. International Conference. College Park: University of Maryland, 1986. (ED 278 310)

Among the papers are "Part-Time Students: Rule or Exception?," a report from Germany, and "Excellence and the Adult Part-Time Student," a discussion of academic standards and accommodation of adult students.

Kerka, S. *Retaining Adult Students in Higher Education. ERIC Digest No. 88*. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1989. (ED 308 421)

Reviews research on the factors affecting retention and the relevance of attrition models for adults. Presents strategies to help adults adapt to the university and to help the university adapt to adults.

Morris, C. *Coming Back to School: A Profile of Fall Term 1987 Transition Center Students*. Miami, FL: Miami-Dade Community College, 1988. (ED 301 307)

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Miami-Dade's Transition Center provides special advisement services for older adults returning to school. Of the 211 clients in Fall 1987, average age was 34, 85 percent were part time, 48 percent female, and 93 percent had prior postsecondary education experience.

100 Ways Colleges Serve Adults. New York: Office of Adult Learning Services, College Board, 1990.

These profiles of successful college programs include marketing and recruitment techniques, admission and retention strategies, curricula developed for adult learners, academic counseling and support, financial assistance, and community relations.

Ottaway, R. N. "Improving Learning for Adult Part-Time Students." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* no. 37 (Spring 1989): 61-69. (EJ 385 711)

Engaging adult part-time learners requires a particular effort to integrate academic learning with the rest of their lives. One such technique involves single-loop and double-loop learning.

Parkinson, K. J.; Hayton, G.; and Strachan, F. *Attrition of Part-Time TAFE Certificate Students.* Payneham, South Australia: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development, 1987. (ED 286 055)

Factors most affecting withdrawal of first-year part-time students in technical and further education (TAFE) in Australia were inability to cope with pressures of home, work, and study; organizing study time; need for only part of a course; and commuting problems.

Porter, J. L. "Empowering the Nontraditional Student through Adult-Specific Programming." Conference paper, 1989. (ED 319 455)

Nontraditional student organizations can integrate adults into the campus environment and help them deal with the demands of college. Planners should recognize adults' time constraints, include significant others in activities, communicate through direct correspondence, and attend to such needs as child care.

Rogers, B. H.; Gilleland, K. R.; and Dixon, G. "Educational Motivations of Part-Time Adults as Related to Socio-Demographic Variables." Conference paper, 1987. (ED 284 492)

Analysis of the motivations of adult nondegree learners taking credit courses extracted four factors: job change, job enhancement, self-improvement, and social contact. Job change was more important for females, adults under 40, and those with incomes below $35,000.

Rose, C. "Satellite Centers: A Non-Threatening, Personalized Environment for Adult, Part-time Students." *Lifelong Learning* 11, no. 6 (April 1988): 19-21. (EJ 368 400)

Alamo Community College District's satellite centers provide off-campus registration, textbook delivery, visits from campus counselors, placement testing, cooperative library services, and a source of campus information.

Rountree-Wyly, J., and Lambert, J. "Model Curriculum Programs and Services for Adult Learners." Conference paper, 1988. (ED 300 620)

In meeting the needs of adults, colleges range from those that ignore them to those that provide flexible scheduling for traditional programs to those that create special adult degree programs. Institutions must make a commitment to adult part-time students, who are expected to make up half of the undergraduate student body.

Schlossberg, N. K.; Lassalle, A. D.; and Golec, R. R. *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Postsecondary Education.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1990.

These scales for assessing students' fit with the campus environment measure five factors: administration, advising, peer interaction, multiple roles, and faculty interaction.

Solomon, K. S. "Impact of Older Students on Higher Education in the United States: 1945-1985." 1991. (ED 331 446)

Colleges often recruit older students, but are not responsive to their needs. Services that should be provided include a learner support center, flexible course arrangements, and caring, committed staff to help them through admissions, remain in school, and find what they want after graduation.

Stolar, S. M. *Non-Traditional Age Students: Attrition, Retention, and Recommendations for Campus Change.* Vineland, NJ: Cumberland County College, 1989. (ED 335 092)

Students aged 25-55 cited the need for a campus day care center; extended evening hours for the bookstore, cafeteria, and offices; greater variety of evening and Saturday classes; telecourses; evening counselor availability; and opportunities for social interaction.

Resource Organizations

American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20036, (202/293-7050).

Association for Continuing Higher Education, c/o Scott Evenbeck, Executive Vice-president, University of Indianapolis, Indiana University-Purdue, 620 Union Drive, Room 143, Indianapolis, IN 46202-5191.

Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202/939-9300).

National University Continuing Education Association, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 420, Washington, DC 20036, (202/659-3130).

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